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In his book *Education in the Balance: Mapping the Global Dynamics of School Leadership* Raphael Wilkins re-conceptualizes school leadership as a world-class profession drawing insights from international research and consultancy experience. He puts forward a new 'pedagogy of school leadership' underpinned by the principles of local embeddedness, global connectedness, reflective inquiry, autonomy, and agency.

Wilkins firstly argues that school leadership should be enacted in organic partnership with local communities. Using the notion of 'space', defined as the subjective experience of place generated in the minds of individuals, he maintains that school leaders need to understand the 'spaces' occupied by different groups in their locality and work in partnership with them to develop a curriculum that is relevant and owned. Such immersion into the local should be complemented by a global outlook enabling leaders to position their choices in relation to the broader context and better understand their thinking and doing. In Wilkins' reasoning, the global and the local are not competing notions, but reinforce each other.

Wilkins then elaborates on the notions of 'connectedness' and 'networks'. He suggests that school leadership should move away from focusing on the administration of a single institution to 'leading the profession' in cross-border networks premised on dialogue, critical inquiry, and agency. In such networks, participants come together on an equal basis to discuss matters of mutual concern and co-create 'spaces' for action. From this perspective, the different structural or physical forms schools may take become less important and emphasis is placed on the 'coherence of the profession'.

According to Wilkins, a catalyst for these local-global dialogic partnerships will be practitioners' engagement in research and knowledge exchanges together with students and other community actors. Such knowledge generation will give leaders authority of judgment and decisional capital to develop collective autonomy in shaping the future of the profession, transforming it from a 'done to' profession at the mercy of politicians and other external forces to a self-regulating profession that promotes alternative purposes and values. In this way, they can convincingly contribute to policy debates and opinion forming, breaking through the political (mis)use of both research and innovation by governments and other powerful agencies.

Wilkins calls for a type of educationally mature activism (detached from leftist stances) that is aimed at generating innovative, yet pragmatic, solutions to problems identified from within. The author's pragmatic stance is evident throughout the book. He critiques orthodox views of school leadership, making the case that leaders should take practical actions in contexts as they find them rather than as they might wish them to be. He advocates finding the right balance in dealing with competing demands, rather than trying to get rid of these (natural) contradictions. Such

competing demands may include: economic development versus social justice; tradition versus innovation; control versus autonomy; evaluation versus non evaluation; measuring versus valuing; short-term versus long-term; rationality versus normative commitment.

The book concludes by envisioning the development of a world-class education professional who will learn, early in his/her career, to work across institutional, cultural, or geographical boundaries, think critically, exercise agency, and embrace responsibility, not for their own institution, but for global educational matters.

Overall, Wilkins effectively articulates a powerful vision for school leadership with potential to inspire educators all over the world to work together towards re-creating their profession. He gives the reader important 'food for thought' by mapping global issues and opportunities, while adopting a balanced positioning void of overly critical stances that allows for varied interpretations. The book is original in its richness of international insight, drawing on a large number of unpublished postgraduate research conducted in different countries and the author's first-hand experience of international consultancy.

Yet, Wilkins' line of thinking often lacks practical insight. Despite his penetrating critical look at recent educational policies in England, he tends to put the onus disproportionately on practitioners to break through existing structural and cultural barriers and reconstruct the profession. He provides little practical guidance as to how this might be achieved given the power of control those in policy-making positions have.

A major weakness of the book is the rather poor, idiosyncratic organisation of the text, which makes it hard for the reader to get a grip on the main point or line of argument. Titles are not straightforward or memorable and the introduction to each chapter does not effectively orient the reader to the core matters being discussed. This, potentially, makes the book inaccessible to those to whom it is likely to be of most relevance, namely educational practitioners. International examples are often described in insufficient detail and give the impression of having been 'compressed' into a limited space. The multitude of examples presented often overshadows the core issues they intend to illustrate, reducing the depth of the analysis.

Wilkins' pragmatic approach also creates contradictions in his arguments. For example, even though he cautions the reader against a deficit model of educational provision, he later makes the case for transferring knowledge from mature systems (such as the English school system) to those at an early stage of development (developing countries), with no elaboration of the subtle power differentials likely to underlie such knowledge transfers, no matter how well intentioned. He surely recognises the need for such transfers to be founded on an organic partnership with

local communities, yet his apparent endorsement of an initially top-down approach to providing support to those who 'lack capacity' contradicts earlier emphases on knowledge '*exchanges*' rather than '*transfers*'.

From this point of view, Wilkins' pragmatic stance eventually becomes a limitation in his analysis. In line with such pragmatism, he advocates decoupling education from strong political thinking (he apparently ascribes the latter negative connotations). Questions arise, though, as to how realistic or desirable such a goal might be, given education's deeply political character in that it always involves some sort of preparation for students' participation as citizens in society. One is, therefore, left wondering about the extent to which the pragmatic stance advocated in the book is, in fact, pragmatic.